

REAL ROMANCES OF THE BUSINESS WORLD

The Awkward Man Who Has Bumped Himself into Millions



socially at least by name.

He came to America an immigrant boy from Germany. He knew but few words of the language, and had almost no friends or acquaintances here. He hunted a long time before he got a job, and when he did get one it was as a porter in the great emporium of A. T. Stewart. So long as Louis juggled sales and boxes and indestructible wares his employer had no reason to complain of him. There never was a more willing porter or one more desirous of doing his work well. He would work any length of time and was extraordinarily eager to please. But now and then, when they took Louis to move goods in this department or that, he fell into disgrace and the stock fell into fragments. He did not seem to have proper control over his arms or legs or his body. With the best intentions in the world, Louis would pick up a perfectly innocent cut glass bowl—and drop it. In trying to walk a straight line he would bump into the counter on either side of the aisle. If there was anybody in the aisle he bumped into that person. He was very apologetic, but very trying to the nerves.

They put up with Louis for a long

time because he was such a nice young man. Two or three times official orders were issued to keep him out of the crockery department. But that didn't hold Louis. They took him into the face department one day, where a new display of the latest importations was to be arranged. There was no chance of his breaking any of those delicate fabrics by dropping them. But a genius for destruction can find ways and means despite all handicaps.

Louis climbed a ladder to put a bolt of the filmy stuff away. His legs and arms misbehaved, as they had done before many times, and Louis and the ladder and the lace had an awful mix-up. When they rescued Louis and untangled his legs and arms from the mass of stuff in which he had entangled himself, the choicest work of one of the greatest mills of Lyons was in shreds and patches. That ended Louis's career with the Stewart emporium, for he was fired incontinent of being a great merchant. He had sat up nights studying the English, persevering as only a German can persevere in his efforts to master the abominable English language, and wondering how it was that such an absurd thing could have been invented. And now it was all of no use. He walked the streets for many days. He tried to obtain work as a common laborer on a city contract, but

it was difficult to get in, for the Irish had a monopoly of this field. He had saved a little money while with A. T. Stewart, and this kept him for a month or two. When his little hoard was nearly spent and his situation was getting desperate he took a job in a beer garden on the East Side as porter. It was a cheap little place on Fourteenth Street.

Long before daylight Louis began his work. For an hour before the establishment opened he was busy cleaning. There hardly is a more menial, a more disagreeable task for any man than that of bar room cleaning. Louis chafed at the employment, but he had to live. After everything had been scrubbed or set to rights he had to turn his attention to the preparation of luncheon. There was a sort of restaurant connected with the saloon, and Louis had to act as cook, prepare the sandwiches, the soup and the few modest dishes that were served to accommodate the noonday trade.

The patrons of that restaurant took wide chances. Sometimes they got the soup and sometimes the soup got them. Sometimes a gentleman would be directing a spoonful of noodles toward his mouth when Louis, en passant, prevented the noodles from making the expected connection. If it was not that Louis was so terribly sorry for the fell work he did, the customers would have been driven to other establishments. But they got to know Louis and his ways. They dodged him and prepared for his coming. Some of them would not sit down until he had all the things on the table. Others ordered him to keep off while they ate. But all of them gave him a tip. He was gracious and obliging, and he was an excellent cook. He tried so hard to please and to overcome his infirmity that it was no wonder he won sympathy. He was so distressed about the mishaps for which he was responsible that he consulted various physicians. These physicians were Germans who came to the beer garden. Louis asked them if there was no way he might be cured of his awkward tendencies. The physicians, for many of them there was nothing in heaven or on earth that could help him—that it was simply a nervous and muscular peculiarity to which tens of thousands of persons were subject.

It was a case of mind and muscles not working in harmony. To blame a person for such an infirmity was as unfair as to hold one responsible for being born lame. So nothing could be done. Louis not only got the opinions of the physicians without cost, but he got tips from them besides. If he had not been for the tip, Louis never would have been content to stop in that place. He was nineteen when he went there. He was twenty-five when he became boss. In those six years, with true German thrift, he saved every dollar he possibly could spare. His employer, careless, prodigal, unstable, had got to drinking and gambling. One day, unable to meet his obligations, he received notice from the brewer that he would have to get out. It was then that Louis came forward and made a proposition to buy the place. He had not quite enough money, but the brewer gave him credit for the remainder. And Louis took charge.

The former proprietor, in his pursuit of horse racing and other forms of gambling, had become Americanized and neglected the German patronage that previously had been the mainstay of the place. Louis was German, intensely German. He had not as yet fully mastered the English language. He wanted German trade, the steady, sure, solid custom of dependable people. He made a specialty of beers of the Fatherland and of dishes the Germans loved. Every waking hour he was in his little saloon. He broke glasses, he smashed dishes, he caromed against tables and bumped into the bar. But he made money and he made friends. He never jarred his patrons' feelings or their tastes.

Louis's little beer garden became a little Germany. Everything suggestive of the old country that he could think of he introduced. Scenes from the Rhine were painted on the walls, and they were painted well. Busts of the poets and philosophers were there, and great soldiers and statesmen whom the Germans loved. There was hardly a German publication of any character that he did not have on file. As soon as he could afford it he introduced music at his place. His musicians were excellent and they made a specialty of German music. Gradually the little beer garden became too small for the business that came to Louis. He had to rent the house adjoining and break through the walls to extend his restaurant service and his beer garden. The place was earning a reputation by this time for the excellence of its German beers. Louis knew just what temperatures his beers should be served. Some kegs were kept on ice for fourteen days before he had them tapped. Others he kept eighteen, and still others he kept twenty-one days. He was as precise and careful about these matters as a great violinist would be in the tuning of his fiddle.

With the increase in space there came a decided change in the character of the patrons. Some of the most prominent Germans in New York came to visit Louis's. William Steinway and his associates took luncheon there every week day. Oswald Stender, Henry Villard and other great Germans were regular visitors. Louis was climbing and beginning to make money pretty fast.

It was about this time that the German gentleman in Louis's line of business was much stirred by the coming to the United States of the greatest brewer in Germany, maker of the most famous of beers. In America society who makes good beer is looked upon with much respect. In England the brewer goes to the House of Lords. This may account for the fact that when the great German brewer came here, the German citizens went far out of their way to do honor to him. Receptions were given to him by the

Liederkrantz and the Arlon. He was the guest of many bankers and was winned and dined in a way that made his heart glad.

In showing the sights of the town to him, some one took him to Louis's. They wanted to show him there was a little of Germany almost intact right here in New York. Louis was overwhelmed when he was introduced to the distinguished visitor. In celebration of the occasion he begged his visitors to do him the honor of drinking some champagne with him. They didn't. They meant to. They had the best intentions in the world, but Louis spoiled it all. In his excess of joy he arose in wishing the health of the brewer. And then he bumped the table, and he kicked his leg, or he fell against something. Whatever he did, he did it, and as luck would have it, everything went the way of the distinguished brewer. He got not only his own glass of wine, but Louis's. He got the hat, he got the glasses, he got about everything there was on the table. The gloomy bosom of his finely laundered shirt was sopping with champagne in a few seconds. His flowered waistcoat was a sight. Some of the colors were not fast—the liquor proved that. Such of the foaming wine as did not get into his shirt or waistcoat landed in his lap, and he would have lost his patience under the circumstances. That German lost his. He said some vicious things to Louis and paid no attention to Louis's frenzied apologies. What could you expect of a man with a wet lap? To make matters worse, the guest of honor had an engagement within half an hour—no, he was particularly anxious to keep Louis did the best he could for him. In addition to apologizing over and over again, he rushed waters out to buy a new shirt for the brewer, and a new vest. They got each of these articles, but they did not get a new pair of trousers. The brewer, somewhat mollified, but still wet, started to keep his appointment.

Poor Louis! He spent a miserable night. In the morning before the brewer was out of bed Louis was at his hotel. He sent his card up and when he was admitted to the brewer's suite he once more tendered his apologies and expressed his great sorrow at the inconvenience he had subjected the gentleman to. The brewer was in a gracious frame of mind, he assured Louis everything was all right, and that his greatest concern was that he had, after all, failed to get the wine.

Then he asked some questions of Louis about America and how he had fared in this country, and Louis told him enough of his experience to awaken the brewer's earnest interest. An immigrant boy who started as a porter and climbed to as assured a position as Louis had must have good stuff in him, the brewer thought. He had noticed, too, before the deluge, how Louis specialized in German beers. The brewer was a man of impulse. He made a proposition to Louis then and there, that almost took his breath away.

"We are not satisfied with our American agent," he told Louis. "We are not selling as much of our product in America as we should. Why don't you take our agency?" he asked.

Louis stammered that that was a new branch of business, that he never had been in anything of that sort and did not like to give up a surety for a speculative undertaking. The brewer assured him the agency need not interfere with his regular business in the slightest degree. And then, after some further talk, Louis agreed to become an American agent.

Through the same careful attention to detail that had built up for Louis his little beer garden, he built up a trade in that German beer. To-day he is sole agent in North America. He has his own agents in Canada, in all the States of the Union, in Mexico, in Central America. Not a gill of this beer comes across the North Atlantic, but pays tribute to him. He has increased his sales enormously. So great has been his success in widening the trade in this beer that he has taken up the agency for other German beers that do not conflict with this one. He has within ten or fifteen years developed a sale agency that is one of the best in America. As a business man Louis is not awkward. Wealth, success and the patronage of the great seem only to accentuate his material awkwardness, however. There is a story the Germans tell about him that is North American in its time when Prince Henry of Prussia came to New York and went to Louis's. Louis would gladly have kissed the prince's hand. Instead, he burnt his nose. The prince had drunk some of Louis's beer, preferred it to the champagne of France. And then, as he took one of Louis's cigars, Louis, in his pride and his joy, struck a match that he might have the great honor of lighting the august royal one's

clear. Ach! Donnerwetter! Why should it be that just at that moment Louis's blundering hand should blunder worse than ever, and that the match intended for the tip of that cigar should instead rest on the tip of the princely nose!

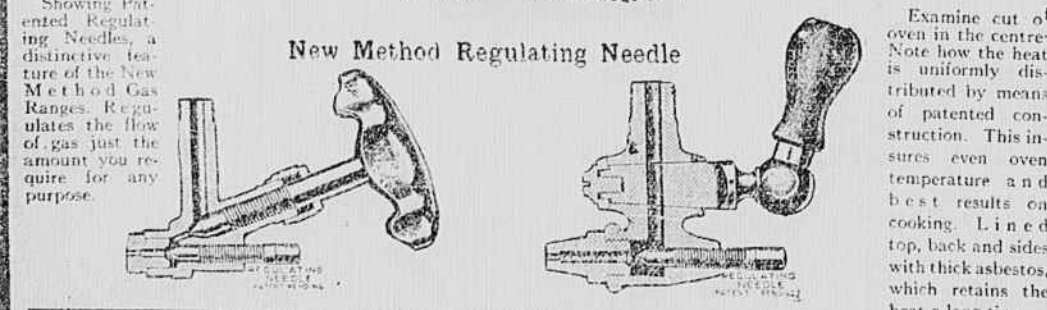
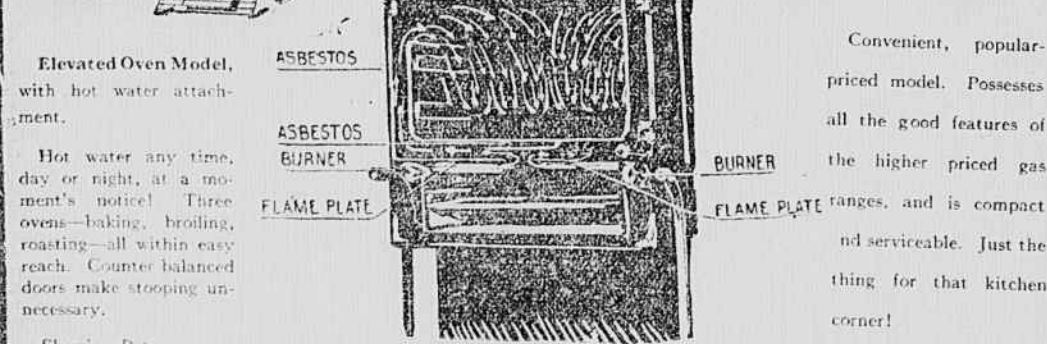
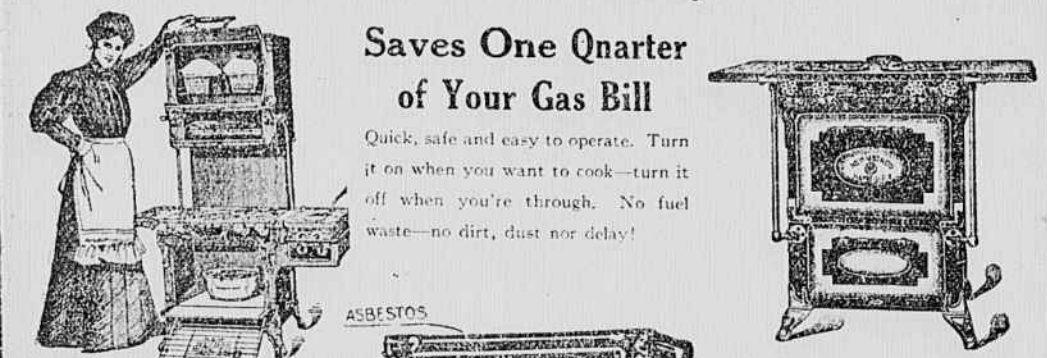
Well for Louis it was that it was Prince Henry and not the Kaiser, lest Louis should have less majesty added to his other crimes.

They had a great time that night anointing the nose of Prince Henry and getting it in shape for its next public appearance. Prince Henry is a good fellow and laughed over the affair as soon as the blunder had subsided. The little German beer garden that Louis started in is conducted by Louis to-day. But it has spread out until it takes in a lot of buildings in the neighborhood. His restaurant has grown to great proportions. It is almost but not quite the largest in New York. Unquestionably it is the most profitable not only in New York, but probably in America. In addition to his restaurant and his beer agency, the man who once was porter in A. T. Stewart's store is one of the owners of the greatest hotel in Louisville, one of the largest hotels in Detroit, and is financially interested in hotels of other cities. He has a rating of \$5,000,000. He is the one shining example of a man whose path to wealth and the high regard of his fellow men is strewn with shattered glasses and broken dishes, torn lace and spilled champagne. He is one millionaire who has prospered by his errors. And the end is not yet. He is only fifty-five.

But still he is the same Louis of the days of A. T. Stewart. He still is a member of the awkward squad. His restaurant has but one blight. With the perversity of genius, Louis promotes each evening down one aisle and up another great aisle of his establishment. Those who know him dodge. The other temper fate. (Copyright, 1911, by Richard Spillane.)

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